1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

Introduction

INDIA is predominantly an agricultural and rural country. An overwhelming majority of her people live in the countryside. In undivided India it was estimated that there were over 700,000 villages within the country. Since partition this number has diminished, but the rural-urban ratio in the population still remains more or less the same. According to various estimates, 70% to 80% of India's population live in villages.

From time immemorial the village has been a basic and important unit of the organization of Indian social polity. It finds prominent mention in the classical texts of the land. For example, according to the *Rig-Veda* (generally dated in the latter half of the 2nd millennium B.C.) society developed in a series of ascending formations, starting from the family (*griha* or *kula*) and gradually extending to the village (*grama*), the clan (*vis*), the people (*jana*) and the country (*rashtra*). The term *grama*, still largely used in India for village, denoted an aggregate of several families sharing the same habitation. Besides mentioning that the village was headed by the *gramini*, chief of the village, the *Rig-Veda* does not give us any details regarding its internal structure or organization or its external affiliations. In post-vedic literature, particularly the epics, we have somewhat more detailed glimpses of the then existing settlements. The *Mahabharata* (*c.* 2nd century B.C.–2nd century A.D.) mentions several types of habitations and settlements, such as cattle farm (*ghosh* or *vraja*), small barbarian hamlets (*palli*), forts to protect surrounding settlements (*durga*), villages developing around the forts (*grama*), town (*kharvata* or *pattan*) and city (*nagara*). Through the *Mahabharata* we get an

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

INTRODUCTION

outline of the system of village and inter-village organization. According to the epic, the village was the fundamental unit of administration, and had as its head the *gramini*, who was its leader and chief spokesman; one of the major responsibilities of this headman was to protect the village and its boundaries in all directions within a radius of two miles. The administrative system was organized on the basis of grouping of villages, each group having its own recognized leader. Thus a group of ten villages was under a *das-gramini*, and this was the first unit of inter-village organization. Two such groups, that is twenty villages, used to be under a *vimsatipa*. A group of a hundred villages was headed by *satgramini* or *gram-satadhyaksha*. Finally, a group of a thousand villages was under an *adhipati*. Several later works touch upon this subject, but they do not add materially to our knowledge of the system of village and inter-village organization in ancient India. However, it will not be out of place to make a brief reference to the place of the village in the writings of Manu (*c.* 200 B.C.–2nd century A.D.), the Hindu law-giver, whose code still largely governs the structure of Hindu society. Manu distinguishes between three kinds of settlements: village (*grama*), town (*pura*) and city (*nagara*). According to him, the village was the fundamental unit of administration, with its own officers and organization. The *gramini* was the head of the village. Apart from the different spheres of socio-religious life in which the family, the clan, the caste and the village were all equally interested, the village as a unit had a number of responsibilities of its own. Thus the maintenance and management of several public utilities such as wells, tanks, ponds, reservoirs, embankments, cow-pens, groves, parks and pastures was under the village itself. Approximately a thousand villages constituted a country and were under a *sahastesa*; within this group were several divisions and subdivisions—a hundred villages under a *satesa*, twenty villages under a *vimsi*, ten villages under a *dasi* and finally the village itself under a *gramini*. Notwithstanding the passage of time, the village system in India still continues to have many of the characteristics described by Manu. Even to-day the village retains its semi-autonomous character. Invariably it has a recognized headman with a definite set of duties and functions. Groups of ten to twenty villages still join together to decide important cases and to discuss issues of common interest. A thousand villages or so constitute a culture-area, or at least a subculture-area, and the

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

INTRODUCTION

rural community within this region invariably has a number of common cultural characteristics and social forms and values.

Yet we cannot regard the Indian village community as static, timeless and changeless. Time and the interplay of historical and sociological factors and forces have influenced the structure, organization and ethos of these communities in many significant ways.

II

To-day it is common to speak of the 'Indian village' or of 'the Indian peasant'. While it is true that many problems are common to the entire Indian countryside, this practice tends to give one an impression that the village as a social and cultural unit possesses a basically uniform organization and structure of values all over the Indian sub-continent. This would obviously be an over-simplified presentation of a rather complex situation. For a proper understanding of their social structure as well as of their problems, it is necessary to classify them into clearly distinguishable types. For such classification several criteria could be employed, including, among others, the following:

i. Size, population and land-area.
ii. Ethnic composition and caste-constitution.
iii. Pattern of land ownership.
iv. Structure of authority and power hierarchy.
v. Degree of isolation.
vi. Local traditions.

Each culture-area of India has its own nomenclature to classify the villages within its territory in respect of their size and population. In the Hindi-speaking parts of north and middle India it is usual to distinguish between *kheda* (a hamlet), *gaon* (a small village) and *kasba* (a large village). In Telangana, the Telugu-speaking part of the State of Hyderabad to which the village of Shamirpet described in this book belongs, a similar distinction is made between *gumpu*, *majra* and *grama*. The first of these denotes a tiny collection of huts, the second is a larger hamlet and the third is the village proper. The differences between these rural settlements are not confined only to their size and population. All three can be classified as belonging to the 'folk society', but they differ so greatly in their internal organization, economic self-sufficiency,

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

621 patterns of adjustment with the outside world and the degree of
184 influence and prestige in the wider rural community that any attempt to combine them would be tantamount to overlooking significant sociological facts. The residents of the large villages look upon themselves as the leaders of the rural community, regarding those from smaller villages as a little less civilized and those from small hamlets as rustics. The man from the smaller village is suspicious and critical about the ways of the people from bigger villages, but he has in his heart of hearts an admiration and respect for them. To him also the people living in still smaller settlements [476] appear to be rather crude and rustic. As the division of labour in [463] the community is governed to a very great extent by traditional caste occupations, and co-operative labour of a number of different castes is required not only for agricultural activities, but also for socio-religious life, the large village, having within its population all the occupational castes, has a comparatively more integrated and self-sufficient economic and socio-religious life than the smaller villages, which, in the absence of one or more occupational castes, may have to depend on some other settlement. Because of its multi-caste constitution, larger population and greater complexity of internal problems, the organization of the larger village is often remarkably different from that of smaller villages. In fact, some of the smaller villages and hamlets come to be regarded as appendages of the larger villages, and although they have considerable autonomy in domestic matters they are very greatly influenced by the views and preferences of their larger neighbour.

The ethnic and linguistic composition of a village, as well as its caste constitution, also determines its character. The structure, ethos and problems of a wholly tribal village will be very different from those of a village with a mixed or homogeneous population. A tribal village is often unitary in respect of its authority structure, the tribal authority itself being supreme in secular, ritual and cultural village matters. On the other hand, in the case of a village which has a mixed population of tribes on the one hand and Hindu castes on the other, or of two different groups of parallel Hindu castes separated from each other by the fact that they speak different languages and belong to different culture-areas, or of Hindus and Muslims, the nature of its internal organization and authority is bound to be different. If the diverse elements of its population have equal strength—numerical as well as economic—

I: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

it generally has a federal type of organization, in that each culture group within this settlement is semi-autonomous, and a common village authority drawn from all these groups has overriding powers for the community as a whole. In areas where there are intense or even pronounced inter-caste rivalries and tensions, the caste composition of the village will largely determine its patterns of inter-group adjustment.

It goes without saying that in a primarily agricultural country land must be greatly prized; and, with the great pressure of population and the conditions of private ownership, possession of land has not only an economic but a social and prestige value as well. Where all the land belongs to a landlord or is held by two or more landlords—as in the case of 'joint-villages'—the organization of the village is sure to be very different from that of a village inhabited by proprietary tenants. The general ratio of land distribution between two or more castes, between certain families or between one big landowner and the rest of the community may have a vital influence on the nature of village organization and problems.

No village in India is completely autonomous and independent, for it is always one unit in a wider social system and is a part of an organized political society. An individual is not the member of a village community alone; he also belongs to a caste, religious group or tribe which has a wider territorial spread and comprises several villages. These units have their own organization, authority and sanctions. Politically the villages are under the legislative, executive and judicial authority of the Indian Union and one of its constituent States. For administrative convenience these States are divided into districts, the latter being subdivided into *tehsils* or *taluquas*. In day-to-day administration the villages come into contact with the authorities and officials of this subdivision and of the district, although the laws of the State and the Union are binding on them. The village thus has independence and autonomy only in its domestic affairs. But who exercises the authority in this field? Is there a petty feudal landlord who has some administrative and judicial powers as well? Is there a government-recognized landlord who has arrogated to himself administrative powers? Or, has the village a *panchayat* (village council) constituted on the basis of local tradition? All the feudal states have been abolished in Republican India; but petty feudal estates still continue in

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

some parts of the country, and effective steps have been taken in very few areas to abolish village landlordism. On the other hand, with a view to reviving village self-government, some State governments are establishing village councils with recognized legal powers, the members of which are appointed by the government. Locus of power in the community is another criterion in respect of which Indian villages often present very different pictures.

Nearness to or isolation from large administrative or industrial centres also has a bearing on the nature of the organization of a village and of its view of the world. Availability of or nearness to modern means of transport and communications also modifies the setting and fabric of a village, and in its classification it is necessary to take into account these vital factors.

Lastly, village settlements are governed by certain traditions—regional and local. The dress, speech and manners, as well as the lay-out of the village and construction of the houses, follow the prescribed patterns of the culture-area. Thus in the different areas we can naturally look forward to a certain degree of diversity in village organization. But apart from these regional variations villages have a corporate unity, and each one possesses an individuality of its own. Some villages are regarded as 'peaceful', others as 'difficult'. Some have a reputation for generosity and fair play, while others are notorious for their meanness. Some are known for being 'upright and strict'; others are criticized for their laxity. Love of litigation is a characteristic feature of some villages; ostentation and display of others; while still others may be very sensitive about their good name. Again, co-operativeness or its absence may characterize some villages. These attributes and qualities may have their roots in strong local traditions or in a combination of factors working at a particular time. But they do give a distinctive character to the village, and a study of the social ways, processes and motivations in such villages will not be without considerable sociological and psychological interest.

In view of the operation of factors delineated above, it is difficult to regard any one village as typical or representative of rural India as a whole. In fact, I would go a step further to say that such a village could hardly be regarded as representative even of its culture-area, except in a very general way. The problem before the social anthropologist and the sociologist is therefore a complex one, and what we need to-day is a series of studies of village com-

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

INTRODUCTION

munities from different parts of the country covering the many divergent patterns of organization and ethos. Until this is done our picture of social systems in rural India will remain vague and inadequate.

From the old ethnographic surveys and some preliminary studies published recently, an outline of the structure and organization of Indian villages is beginning to emerge clearly. Notwithstanding many significant differences, they have a number of structural similarities. In the north, middle and peninsular India, as well as in the eastern and western parts of the country, the following features characterize a very large number of villages.

1. As a territorial, as well as social, economic and ritual unit, the village is a separate and distinct entity. The residents of this settlement recognize their corporate identity, and it is recognized as such by others. It is not uncommon to find in them a sentiment of attachment towards their own settlement site. In several matters the village acts as a unit.

2. These settlements have a composite population comprising a number of groups belonging to different Hindu castes, and in some cases to tribes as well as to other religious groups. As far as the Hindu section of the population goes, these diverse groups are inter-dependent and integrated in the social, economic, ritual and administrative organization of the community. No caste alone is self-sufficient, for it requires the services of several other occupational castes which hold the monopoly of certain crafts and professions. This system of co-operative labour, based on a pattern of inter-caste relations approved by tradition, is not confined only to economic activities but also extends to ceremonial and ritual life. The hierarchical organization of castes within the community is so fixed in the structural patterns of rural India that the tribal as well as the non-Hindu (such as Muslim and Christian) segments of the population come to be regarded as other castes in the village.

In many parts of India, while maintaining their socio-religious identity, several of these non-Hindu groups have acquired some caste characteristics, particularly occupational specialization. For example, in some areas of rural India the Muslims function as an occupational caste variously, making fireworks, weaving, driving *tongas*, *ikkas* and other hackney-carriages, selling vegetables or playing musical instruments.

3. The members of this local group are bound together by ties

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

INTRODUCTION

of mutual and reciprocal obligations. Inter-personal and inter-group relations in several spheres of village affairs are governed by an established usage and social ethics. Breaches of the norms of the community and its established usage are dealt with either by the village elders or by a village council. The village council, speaking for the village, has the final authority of social ostracism through which it can effectively enforce its sanctions.

III

Modern community studies represent a very significant development in the field of social anthropology and sociology. The concepts and techniques formerly applied to the study and analysis of primitive and isolated tribal societies are now being adapted for the study of peasant communities, non-literate as well as literate, and also for the analysis of more complex and industrialized communities. This new direction in the focus of interest of an increasing number of social scientists and field-workers has inevitably led to important modifications in our conceptual framework and to a sharpening of our tools of research. The methodology of social sciences and techniques of field research have both gained very considerably from this new trend. The work of Robert Redfield, John Gillin, Sol Tax and Ralph Beals, among others, represents a substantial advance in this field, both in theory and in methodology. From Robert Redfield's *Tepotzlan: A Mexican Village* to Oscar Lewis's *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepotzlan Re-Studied* this branch of social anthropological enquiry has travelled far: the former inaugurated an epoch, which then appeared to be full of promise; the latter is a convincing proof of its maturity. On Middle America we now have a series of interesting and useful studies. In other parts of the world also important researches of this kind have been made. Studies of the great peasant societies of the Far East received encouragement and support from scholars both in Great Britain and in the United States. Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's forewords to the works of Fei and Embree bear testimony to the interest evinced in community studies by the British social anthropologists. The work of Martin C. Yang and Francis L. K. Hsu received constructive support in the United States. A remarkable feature of some of these Far Eastern studies is that they were done not by Western scientists but by scholars

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

Shamirpet and the neighbouring cluster of villages. However, villagers are able to collect some fuel as well as small quantities of edible and marketable minor forest produce from the local scrub jungle. In this type of landscape little game is to be expected. Tigers from the forests fifteen or twenty miles away are occasionally seen, but panthers, in search of stray goats, calves and dogs, are more frequent visitors to the village. Wild pigs are plentiful and always do very considerable damage to the crops. Spotted deer make an occasional appearance in the surrounding areas, while hares which abound in the shrubs are very often shot or hunted with dogs trained for this purpose. Wild ducks come seasonally to the large tank near the village, and green pigeons and partridges are among the other feathered game found in the vicinity of Shamirpet.

It has been pointed out that Shamirpet is only some twenty-five miles from Hyderabad and Secundrabad, which rank fourth among the cities of India in respect of population and size. It is only fifteen miles from the Bolarum cantonment and twelve miles from the military aerodrome of Hakimpet. A regular bus service plying between Hyderabad and Karimnagar touches Shamirpet, and there are about twelve buses running in both directions on this road every day. From this it should not be assumed, however, that Shamirpet is just a suburban extension of Hyderabad. Although it is in regular and constant touch with the capital, it is an independent village with an organization of its own.

No village in India can be singled out as being typical of the country as a whole, but Shamirpet possesses most of the characteristics which are common to the rural communities in middle and peninsular India. As an independent socio-economic and ritual unit it enjoys partial self-sufficiency in several aspects of community life. In the wider organization of the rural community it possesses partial autonomy. Its component units are mostly the occupational castes which are integrated into the structure of the village. Finally, it has a semi-judicial village council composed of caste elders and other influential persons. This council administers justice in socio-religious cases involving breaches of the traditional norms of society. The village as a unit of social organization performs several significant functions which form an important agency of social control.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

it is used for the growing of vegetables, specially fruit-bearing creepers, and throughout the year it is used by the household fowls. Similarly, in most of these houses the cattle-shed is very close to the main living-room. Hardly half a dozen houses in the village have latrines; the majority of the people go out into the fields or behind the rocks for answering the call of nature. Notwithstanding some variety, the decorative designs found on all the houses follow a generally established pattern. The floors are swept twice every day in almost all the houses. The mud floor is periodically smeared with cow-dung mixed with water and the walls are washed annually with lime or coloured earth. Grain and provisions are stored in large receptacles made either by the potter and well burnt to a vermilion red or by the Erkala in their traditional styles of basket-work.

All the houses in Shamirpet can be classed into one of these three types. The Gudse-type huts of the Erkalas are, however, a class by themselves. These small, circular huts, made from sheets of weed-matting, are about twenty feet in diameter and are often only six feet high. The interior is unpartitioned and serves as bedroom, dining-room, living-room and kitchen. Pigs and poultry are housed in similar but smaller round huts built in the immediate vicinity of the dwelling-hut.

From time to time groups of families belonging to the nomadic castes come to the village. These have their low, portable huts, which are mostly made of folding bamboo screens. Almost every month some group belonging to this category makes its appearance in Shamirpet and after a stay of a week or so moves off with its huts, dogs and pigs.

5. THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SHAMIRPET

The nearness of Shamirpet to the cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad has been mentioned. People holding small government posts or having urban relations make periodic visits to the city. Others, especially young men, cycle down to Secundrabad or Hyderabad to visit the cinema or to look at the shops.

In the broad social sense, however, Shamirpet's more intimate ties are with the villages in the neighbourhood. In the events and developments of these villages the people of Shamirpet are very keenly interested. The hamlets of Babugura and Upparpalli are

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

in fact entered as parts of the village of Shamirpet in government records, and in a sense they are; nevertheless, on a restricted scale they enjoy considerable autonomy. The elders of the hamlets try, as far as possible, to decide the hamlet's minor disputes without referring them either to the headman or to the village council of Shamirpet. They say, 'We are poor inhabitants of a small hamlet. Our resources are limited. The people of Shamirpet are prosperous; they have adopted the ways of the city. If we refer our cases to them, they will impose such fines that our necks will break.' Yet there are many cases in which one of the disputing parties, dissatisfied with the judgement of the elders and possessing the necessary financial resources or influential support, will refer the case to the Shamirpet village council. In all such cases one or two elders and influential people from the hamlet in question are summoned to attend the proceedings of the village council at Shamirpet. Similarly, for all the ceremonies organized jointly by the people of Shamirpet as a whole it is customary to send invitations to Babugura and Upparpalli and it is expected that they will be represented by at least some of the village elders. When the people of the village as a whole are summoned on government business to the district or subdivisional headquarters, the residents of the two hamlets have also to accompany the people of Shamirpet, for all the three settlements are, according to government records, component units of one village. However, the distance between Shamirpet and the two hamlets is an effective barrier to the pursuance of a common social life. And from this point of view the two hamlets are as independent as two self-contained small villages.

The area surrounding Shamirpet is quite densely populated. It is not unusual to find a village or a small hamlet every three to six miles, and Shamirpet is surrounded by a number of villages, some large and others small. With most of these, Shamirpet, as a village, has very little to do. However, individual residents remain in constant touch with friends and relations in the surrounding villages. Ceremonies connected with the major crises of life, i.e. birth, marriage and death, often take people out of Shamirpet to the neighbouring villages, or bring people from there into Shamirpet. For a more or less well-defined block of villages the different castes have their respective caste councils, to which matters concerning the caste only are taken.

E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

CHAPTER TWO

Social Structure

To understand the social structure of an Indian village it is necessary to examine the various units through which the village community is organized. The basic and primary unit of the society is the elementary or joint family. Every family belongs to an exogamous division of a caste and several such divisions constitute an endogamous caste or an endogamous section of a large caste. Only excommunication or a change of religion can alter the position of the individual in any such social units. On the other hand, every family belongs to the community with whom it shares a settlement site, be it a village or a hamlet attached to a village. In socio-religious affairs, control of the individual is threefold—that of his family, his village and his caste. Often it is only the independent, endogamous division of the caste which takes cognizance of offences and penalizes erring members, and not the caste as a whole. On the other hand, very serious cases or matters concerning more than one village may be heard and decided by a larger judicial organ, comprising members of all the constituent villages. The structure and organization of the family, as well as the criterion of status differentiation in the community, can best be described in a separate chapter; here we shall examine the division of the community into castes, and follow it up by an analysis of the internal organization of the village with special reference to authority and the machinery regulating the administration of justice in the village.

1. CASTE IN THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY

The Hindus and the Muslims constitute two distinct sections in the population of Shamirpet. Although long residence and close

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

2. INTERNAL ORGANIZATION: AUTHORITY AND MACHINERY OF JUSTICE

In the internal organization of Shamirpet two different units can be clearly delineated. The socio-religious organization of the village with its independent set of office-bearers and functionaries is quite distinct from the administrative organization of government and semi-government officials.

The following diagram will illustrate the internal organization of the village in socio-religious matters:

Deshmukh
Headman of the village)

Panchayat
(Village council)

Ganadi
(Organizers of village ritual)

Kulam-pedda
(Headmen of the different castes)

Peddamanshi
or
Inti-pedda
(Head of the family)

The Deshmukh is the hereditary headman of the village. He is the richest person in the settlement and has very considerable landed property. His forefathers became the headmen of the village some three hundred years ago, and since then the family has retained the title and office. By virtue of his wealth, position and the contacts he maintains with powerful government officials, the Deshmukh is a pivotal figure in the village and enjoys a position of great influence. Although his word is no longer law, he still wields very great influence in the village and is always given a place of honour at all village ceremonies. Village disputes of any importance are always referred to him, and his decisions and wishes are seldom disregarded. However, the Deshmukh takes very few decisions on his own authority and initiative. He seeks the help of the *panchayat*, which can be regarded as the central council for the village as a whole. Of course, the Deshmukh takes a prominent part in the deliberations and discussions of the *panchayat* and often guides it in such a way that his wishes in the matter are carried out.

The *panchayat* or village council consists of the headmen of

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

night. Dogs, cats and donkeys dying in the village have to be disposed of by him, for the Madigas only deal with dead cattle and will have nothing to do with other carcases. The Yettis in Shamirpet are from the Sakali and the Madiga castes. The Sakali Yettis do most of the superior kinds of menial work, such as carrying the baggage of touring government officials who would not allow their luggage to be carried by the untouchable Madigas; while the Madiga Yettis have to do all sorts of odd jobs of an inferior nature. They may be required to patrol the village, to keep watch on government buildings and to sweep and clean the village occasionally. They are also required to bring fuel for the use of touring government officials. The Yettis are not paid any salary for their work, and the nominal payments made to them by touring officials bear no proportion to the work done by them. The rest of the village menials are occupational caste groups, also performing some semi-government duties. The Wadla, for example, must repair the flood-gates of the tank, attend to the repairs of furniture and other woodwork in government offices, repair the central flag post in the village and supply free of charge or on nominal payment the pegs required for fixing the tents of touring government officials. When required the Kammari do iron work for the government officials. The Kummari has to supply earthen pots for use on public occasions or for the use of touring government officials. The Sakali cleans the kitchen utensils and plates of touring government officials, washes their clothes and carries their baggage to the next camp. The Mangali lights the lamps in the village rest-house, shaves touring officials and massages their bodies if they require this service. The Ausula has the duty of examining, when required to do so, coins which are believed to be counterfeit. He has also to help the police in weighing stolen ornaments and in making estimates of their approximate market price. Finally, the Dappu and the Kommu, who are both Madigas, play their drums and pipes respectively on public occasions. They make all public announcements by the beat of drum and are, like the Yetti, often required to do other menial work as well.

3. INTER-CASTE AND INTER-VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

The village is a territorial unit, the smallest but most significant among territorial groups in the social organization of the village

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

communities. Persons belonging to several different castes are united by some common values and obligations in this unit. But caste as a unit of social organization cuts across the narrow boundaries of the village and extends to a fairly wide geographical region. The *varna* system or the fivefold division of Hindu society is an all-India phenomenon, but in the different geographical and linguistic regions these *varnas* are divided into numerous castes (*jati*) which are practically distinct from and independent of comparable castes in other areas. Thus in South India, in the Tamil, Malayalam and Telugu-speaking regions respectively, there are separate groups of Brahmins who constitute independent castes. There are numerous restrictions on inter-dining, and intermarriage between them is not permitted. All these groups will be designated by the generic term Brahmin; but in actual practice they are each a separate caste characterized by endogamy and distinctive local traditions. It has been pointed out earlier that culturally Shamirpet lies in the area of Telangana, which is a part of the larger culture-area of Andhra-desa. Most of the castes in the village confine their social intercourse to Telangana itself, a few extending it to other parts of Andhra-desa. The Muslims, being converts to an alien religion, are not obliged to observe this rule and can freely inter-marry with Muslim immigrants from other parts; but among them also marriage between people already having some blood ties is preferred. For Hindu castes it may be said that in actual practice a number of neighbouring villages constitute for them a quasi-independent local group within the wider regional community. In analysing one hundred and twenty family case-histories, it was found that out of three hundred and eighty marriages over 68% were confined to a group of villages (and the cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad) within a radius of approximately thirty-five miles from Shamirpet; 30% to other villages within sixty miles of the village; and only 2% in still more distant villages or towns. In no case was a marital union entered into with a non-Telugu caste, even with a similar caste name and social status in another linguistic or geographical area. Thus the horizontal ties of caste extend to the whole culture area, but active social relationships are generally confined to a cluster of neighbouring villages.

Two types of inter-village organizations deserve to be noted. They are councils of the different castes and inter-village councils.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

Hinduism in the course of the last four or five generations. They do not believe in any of the gods of the Hindu Trinity, nor in any of the later incarnations; but they share with the Hindus a living faith in the existence of malevolent ghosts, spirits and witches. They participate with the rest of the community in village ceremonies and sacrifices. To ward off cholera, plague and smallpox, they too think that it is necessary to propitiate the local deities and goddesses.

Village Hinduism is not easy to describe. It is an extremely elastic religion, and within its all-India framework admits of a considerable degree of regional and local variation. In his *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, M. N. Srinivas has introduced the useful concept of 'spread', and split up village Hinduism into 'All India Hinduism', 'Peninsular Hinduism', 'Regional Hinduism', and 'Local Hinduism'.

The people of Shamirpet worship all the major gods of the Hindu pantheon, but many of their cults distinctly belong to the complex of ritual that can be regarded as peculiar to peninsular India. Some of these observances present variations which are confined only to this particular village.

The Hindu concept of a Trinity, comprising three manifestations of divinity—Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the sustainer; and Shiva, the destroyer—has an all-India spread, and in common with the Hindus of the other parts of India the residents of Shamirpet principally worship either Shiva, or Vishnu and his numerous incarnations—particularly Rama and Krishna. The concepts of soul (*atma*), of the reckoning of an individual's actions and their consequences on his present and future life (the concept of *karma*), of laying emphasis on the right ordering of life and on doing what is just and moral (concept of *dharma*), of heaven and hell, and finally of the transmigration of the soul and its re-birth also have such an all-India spread; although there are significant regional and local variations in their details. Finally, the nature of rituals connected with the human life-cycle has been very considerably influenced by the Sanskritic ritual of all-India Hinduism, but it still continues to be characterized by some distinctive regional peculiarities.

All over India some rivers are regarded as sacred, and legends and cults grow around them. The Godavari is among the rivers whose sanctity and importance have been enhanced by prominent

[The Muslims — Analyst]

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

CHAPTER SIX

The Levels of Living

1. STATUS DIFFERENTIATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Six major factors contribute towards status differentiation in the village community of Shamirpet. They are:

i. Religion and caste.
ii. Landownership.
iii. Wealth.
iv. Position in government service and village organization.
v. Age.
vi. Distinctive personality traits.

Religion divides the community into two distinct groups: the Hindus and Muslims, standing out in marked contrast to each other. Hinduism is the older and longer established religion, and the majority of people in the village are Hindus. The Muslim group is largely composed of local converts, drawn from a number of castes—high and low. The Hindus naturally have a feeling of superiority regarding their religious faith and its antiquity, and do not view with favour the indiscriminate mixing of different castes in the Muslim community. But until 1948 they could not express these feelings openly as the Muslims had the backing of the State administration. The State was under Muslim rule, and being of the 'ruling race' the village Muslims were naturally in an advantageous position. They claimed superiority over the Hindus, and tried to dominate the village scene. While practical considerations forced the Hindus to remain silent, the Muslims aggressively denounced them as heathens. It had its reaction: after the Police Action, when Hyderabad was no longer a feudal

I. Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

earlier in this chapter, suggests that an extrovert and sensitive people who cannot conceal their approval or disapproval and who do not suppress their immediate reactions cannot have a very peaceful and quiet life. Indeed most of the tensions are short-lived, but quarrels and conflicts are numerous and frequent. As the community is partially autonomous in several spheres of life, it is necessary for it to have an effective mechanism for the control of these conflicts.

Shamirpet, however, is only partially autonomous, for it is a part of a wider social system. The extent of caste organization is regional, and covers a very large number of villages. In several spheres of life it is the caste rather than the village that has the upper hand in controlling the behaviour of its constituents. Details of ritual connected with the life-cycle, and observance of the *mores* and norms of the caste fall in this category. Further the village is but a small unit in the national political structure of a sub-continent. Its laws are made by the State Legislature and the Union Parliament; and the law-enforcing arm of the State extends to it as effectively as it does to the rest of the country. This brings the State police and magistracy on the scene. All important breaches of law go to the civil and criminal courts. What remains of the autonomy of the village appears quite insignificant, but in actual practice relatively few cases go to caste councils, fewer to courts of law, and left to itself to control the inter-group and inter-personal relations of its members the machinery responsible for social control and justice within the village finds itself burdened with considerable work.

How is this mechanism set in motion? How does it work? Presently I shall give a few illustrative cases which will reveal the process in certain typical situations. At this stage it is necessary to point out that all cases of conflict do not go to the village council. In many cases the parties to the dispute boisterously quarrel over the issue and there the matter ends. For a few days they probably will not be on speaking terms, leave each other out of social functions and ceremonies, and continue to indulge in mutual recriminations and behind-the-back slander; but in course of time normal relations will be resumed. In other cases mediation or arbitration of the elders may be sought or may be volunteered by the elders themselves. When influential village elders notice disorderly or unbecoming behaviour on the part of someone

691 off small debts, serious sexual intrigues, domestic quarrels assuming serious proportions, etc., keep on coming before the village council again and again. It is very rarely that it has to take the final step of ordering the social boycott of an individual. Caste *panchayats*, on the other hand, take recourse to this weapon very often when breaches of caste convention are brought to their 688 notice. Eating with a lower caste, sex intrigue outside the caste, failure in observing injunctions attached to the status of ritual impurity, and inability to perform any major ritual are all punished by ostracism. This involves denial of social equality to the ostracized family. No one will share food or drink with it. No member of such a family will be invited to attend a socio-religious ceremony, nor will anyone accept his invitation. Its status of social equality will be restored when it performs the necessary rituals for the expiation of its offence.

578 Our investigations did not reveal the existence of any serious inter-group tensions and conflicts in the community. Just before and after the Police Action there was some Hindu-Muslim tension: in the first phase Muslims terrorized the Hindus; in the second the Hindus looted property from one Muslim house and terrorized the other Muslims generally and their ringleaders particularly. Between different castes or living-quarters of the village, within living memory, there were only two major disputes. Their details are not remembered, but it is claimed that the tension was short-lived and cordiality was established very soon between the warring sections.

578 The corporate unity of the village finds its fullest expression
●621 when the inhabitants come into conflict with outsiders. The
609 village of Aliyabad shares with Shamirpet the water from the tank for the purposes of irrigation. The ratio of water supplied to Shamirpet and Aliyabad has been fixed at 5:2. Over this there are always some difficulties. One night the floodgates were opened, and the water that should have irrigated Shamirpet fields was diverted to Aliyabad fields. Next morning an organized team from Shamirpet attacked Aliyabad. There were three different theories regarding what had happened the previous night. Aliyabad people said that the guards of the floodgates had asked them to take the water under the impression that it was their turn. The guards said that being threatened with violence they allowed the Aliyabad men to divert the water to their area.

I: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

Perhaps the fact of the matter was that Aliyabad men had obtained the favour by bribing the guards; but their excessive greed in not allowing any water into Shamirpet fields had exposed their game. Prompt official intervention checked ugly developments; and later the issue was resolved at inter-village level. But in the dispute itself the two villages had forgotten their internal differences and dissensions and each of them had acted as one body. Another instance of such concerted action and village unity is provided by the conflict between the residents of Shamirpet and eight army men from the nearby cantonment. These eight people came to the village in two army trucks and started loading their vehicles with firewood cut and stored by a resident of the village. Obviously the army men intended to take it away without payment. The owner of the house tried to check them, and in the process he was badly beaten up. In the meantime the news had reached the other village people, who came rushing to the spot armed with sticks. They did what they thought proper at the time to avenge the honour of the village. Outnumbered by the villagers, the army men returned to their camp, threatening to bring their company to destroy the entire village. Police intervened and the trouble was not allowed to develop further.

In a society resting on rigid division of the population into castes separated by strict rules governing touching, eating and drinking, sex relations and matrimony, and social distance prescribed by tradition it is essential that people realize certain limitations and accept certain conditions. Caste consciousness develops quite early in one's life and these limitations and conditions are absorbed long before maturity by all through conversation groups, play-groups and general social experience. So far there has been no attack on the general premises on which the society rests, and therefore no serious inter-group or inter-caste conflicts have arisen. The lower castes have accepted their inferior status, and while they have made efforts to improve their lot they have not openly revolted against it. In their turn the higher castes have also shown considerable adaptability, and recognizing the general social trend they have readjusted their attitudes and curbed some of the earlier excesses and injustices. They may still object to being touched by a low caste man, but they will not protest against his wearing superior clothing befitting only the upper castes.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

THE CHANGING SCENE

178 The social structure of the village is basically the same
621 although with every administrative or political change in the village there were several organizational changes. The primary unit in this structure is either the elementary family (maintaining close contacts with allied families) or it is a large joint family. The head of each family is known as the 'big man'. The next unit is the caste; or in the case of the Muslims, the group sharing a common religion. Each of these groups has a hereditary caste headman who represents it in the village council. Finally, this council consists of these headmen of the different castes, three Ganadi and the headman of the village who is its presiding officer. The following tables show the significant lines of variation in social organization, with special reference to family, caste and village council:

I—FAMILY

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Then	*Now*
(1) Insistence on family solidarity and cohesion.	(1) Growth of individualism.
(2) Greater attachment to the soil and settlement.	(2) Migrations more frequent.
(3) Intra-family relations governed by regard for age and kinship status.	(3) Less regard for these traditional principles.

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II—CASTE

Then	*Now*
(1) Occupational specialization on the basis of caste.	(1) Caste no longer the final and only determinant of occupation.
(2) Prohibition on inter-dining with some equal castes and all lower castes.	(2) Rules of inter-dining less rigid.
(3) Hierarchy and permanent distance between different castes.	(3) Mild protest against social hierarchy: some modification in actual practice.

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III—VILLAGE COUNCIL

Then	*Now*
(1) Constituted on hereditary principles.	(1) Also admits people with 'achieved status'.
(2) Little outside intervention.	(2) Considerable outside pressure.
(3) Decisions generally accepted.	(3) Defiance or avoidance possible.

1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

well as the village cults still continue to retain their former position.

The Police Action undertaken by the Indian Union in 1948 changed the fortune and status of the State of Hyderabad. The most significant outcome was that political power changed hands —from an extremist communal party to the people of the State. It had a profound effect on the rural areas. However, sufficient time must elapse before we can evaluate its total influence on the life of the community. But it has set in motion certain trends which are not without interest to the student of social change in peasant communities.

The first definite change is that Muslims who occupied a privileged position during the former régime now no longer do so. On account of some of their un-neighbourly acts of terrorism during the last phase of extremist Muslim rule in the State some of them had become very unpopular. Fearing retaliation by the Hindus they ran away from the village temporarily. Now they have all returned. For some time they were jeered at and ridiculed, but at the time of our study cordiality had returned to the Hindu and Muslim sections of the population.

The second noticeable change is that under the administrative reforms initiated by the new administration forced labour and forced extraction of hospitality by government officials have been prohibited. In practice they still continue on a restricted scale. Government's decision to take determined steps against bribery and corruption has been announced; but firm action still remains to be taken in this direction.

Thirdly, the abolition of feudal estates has been a big step in the direction of land reform. With the end of the Jagirdari system Shamirpet has once again come under normal district administration. Further reforms ensuring a more equitable distribution of land, fixing a maximum limit on land holding and ending the evils of absentee landlordism are under contemplation. When these plans materialize substantial changes can be expected.

Fourthly, the government has intensified its welfare and nation-building activities. The village is to have a better school in the near future. The Public Health Department is already more active. The Agriculture and Veterinary departments are making a better planned and organized effort towards the introduction

S. Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

medicines and injections. The old beliefs and practices survive, partly because of the non-availability of quick and efficient modern treatment, and partly also because of its prohibitive cost. Besides the two systems do not conflict, and in order to be doubly sure, most people continue magico-religious practices along with modern medicinal treatment. Adoption of several new tools and instruments for occupational work, as well as of several other items of Western technology, such as buses, railways, razors, and electric torches, introduced in the comparatively recent times is due to their efficiency and utility. In the matter of dress and ornament other factors must also be taken into account. Mill-made cloth was not regarded only as cheap and more durable; it came to be looked upon as more respectable also. The coarse handloom cloth was regarded as rustic, the finer mill-cloth, on the other hand, was more refined and dignified. Further, mill-made cloth allowed a wider range of choice in the matter of colours, designs and patterns. The style of dress was influenced by a variety of factors. Under Muslim rule the style of dress of the rulers became fashionable. With Congress in power there was a sudden switch from the Muslim court-dress to Congress-patronized national dress. Modern Indian—as well as Western-style clothes—cigarettes, sun-glasses and tea are not only popular because of their utility, they possess a great prestige value as well.

Influence of the city has brought about adjustment and modification in several spheres, but the need of balancing different extremes in the organization of the community has so far prevented any drastic structural change in village communities. Under the impact of the new socio-economic factors the family ties have weakened, the kin-group has lost some of its characteristic strength and in the system of status evaluation achieved-status is competing with traditionally ascribed status; but the society still continues to be caste-structured as caste plays a vital role in its social, economic and ritual organization. Democracy has brought in its wake party organization and elections which demand group formation and group allegiance: in several rural areas no new groups have emerged, the loyalties of the people have only been re-affirmed to the pre-existing caste groups. While no important social or economic projects and reforms have so far been put into operation, the first major political change—the

1: Dube E-5 (1351-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

178 621 [666] introduction of democratic elections—has demonstrated the strength of the traditional system which has made a bid for absorbing 'political group formation' and 'democratic elections' in its all-embracing caste structure. Deeper and more far-reaching economic and technological changes, as well as externally induced social reform, touching the basic framework of rural societies, may present a different set of problems and test the strength of the caste structure. Under their new pressures and incentives the community may have to work out a new pattern of adjustment which may necessitate important structural changes.

178 Limited as this change has been, it is none the less not unimportant to ask who inspires and leads this movement towards modification of traditional ways and adoption of new elements of culture. To answer this question it is necessary to analyse the major cultural trends operating in India as a whole. Viewing the country broadly, we find three major trends: (i) the regional culture, founded on the traditions, customs and life-ways of the culture-area; (ii) the national culture, comprising some all-India traits inspired by the national renaissance, cemented by the struggle for self-government as well as by social and economic reform, and sustained by the will to find a rightful place in the comity of nations; the elements in this category being partly revivalistic and partly conscious innovations; and (iii) adoption of traits and elements from Western technology and culture. Besides these, in any given area the 'urban' and 'folk' or rural patterns are clearly distinguishable. While in the urban areas all the three trends delineated above are found to operate with more or less equal force, in the rural areas the folk variety of the regional culture is still predominant although it has been modified by national and Western elements. The inspiration and lead for modification in the traditional ways definitely come from the urban areas brought into the village community by semi-urbanized people or inspired by the example of urban relatives. In the Indian setting while there is no polarity between 'folk' and 'urban' societies, for a proper perspective of social change this classificatory device can be used very effectively. On a limited scale the struggle for supremacy between 'old' and 'new' or between 'tradition' and 'progress' goes on in cities and smaller towns also, and every generation finds itself with a modified set of values. The rural communities clearly take the lead from the urban areas, although